

[Reprinted from The Literary Digest for May 10]

# JUSTICE

## For the Foster-Parents of Our Children

IT IS STRANGE that the generous-hearted American people, who poured out their riches so prodigally in response to every patriotic, every charitable appeal, and who accorded such enthusiastic and liberal support to every measure and to every group that helped win the war, should have neglected to properly encourage and reward the services of one of the noblest professions in the field of human activities—a profession that in lofty ideals, in unselfish principles, in sacred responsibilities, stands side by side with the ministry of the Gospel itself.

We wish to bespeak, with whatever power and authority we may have and with such words as may be granted to us, some measure of consideration for the foster-fathers and mothers of our children—the school-teachers of the United States of America.

There is no class of workers of which we demand so much. We commit into their keeping the minds, the bodies, and the very souls of our children in the tender and formative years of their lives, and they, receiving these children, can indeed be said to hold in the hollow of their hands the future of America. We expect these devoted men and women to watch over and care for our sons and daughters as tho they were their very own, to drill them in the arts and sciences, to train them for business and for citizenship, to instruct them in manners and in morals, to do for them those things which we would do had we the training and the leisure.

No class has assumed so heavy, so trying a burden and a responsibility with such willingness as these consecrated men and women. No class has performed their increasingly heavy tasks more devotedly, more conscientiously, and with less thought of self. No class served their country more whole-heartedly, more loyally, during the trying and tempestuous times of war, day by day pursuing their round of duty, day by day helping the young people, and through the children the parents, to see the struggle in its true light, thus securing the cooperation of the community in every measure undertaken by the Government to win the war.

Truly they have made the nation their everlasting debtor. Truly had they not done their work so well this republic would not outlast the span of a generation.

What then have the teachers received at our hands in return? They have received little of honor and somewhat less of pay. Other classes have prospered; other classes through powerful organizations have secured generous wages. The teachers have no spokesman, however, to demand even the simple justice of a living wage, so to them we give their petty prewar pittance, so meager, so pitifully inadequate, that it places a burning brand of shame and disgrace upon this nation.

The men and women who are making the Americans of to-morrow are being treated with less consideration than the janitors who sweep out the buildings in which they are employed; they are earning, on the average, less than the wages given to the scrubwomen employed in the public buildings of the United States Government. Normal-school graduates receive less salary than street-sweepers; high-school principals and superintendents less than section foremen; country school-teachers less for instructing the farmer's children than he pays his hired man to feed his hogs.

In a certain town of Illinois, for instance, the average wages of fifteen miners for one month was \$217, while the average monthly salary of fifteen teachers in the same town was \$55. In another town a miner, who, by the way, was an enemy alien, drew more than \$2,700 last year, while the salary of the high-school principal in the same town was \$765. We welcome with all our hearts the long-belated recognition that is being given to the man who works with his hands. We believe that this same workingman will be the first to join with us in asking better pay for those who teach his children.

No wonder there are fifty thousand vacancies in the teaching forces of the schools. No wonder the ranks are being filled with weak men and with immature women who merely use the profession as a stepping-stone to something better. No wonder there are thirty thousand teachers in the United States who have had no schooling beyond the eighth-grammar grade. Small wonder, indeed, that seven million of our school-children are being trained by teachers, mere boys and girls themselves, who have had no professional education whatever.

When we consider that the 740,000 teachers of America are paid an average salary of \$630 a year; when, moreover, we consider the fact that living costs have actually advanced 103 per cent. since the beginning of the war, thereby cutting the buying-power of those insignificant salaries in half, we can easily determine that only a fool or a martyr would choose teaching as a profession, or would long remain in it unless these terrible conditions were swiftly remedied.

What a crime is this! What an indictment! What an unpardonable sin at the doors of an enlightened people who now find themselves at the head and forefront of the democracies of the world! How can we better prepare for the great undertakings of reconstruction than by setting ourselves immediately to remedying this perilous condition? In these trying and chaotic times, when the world is beset by unrest, by anarchy, by revolution, by the devil's brood of appalling evils that follow in the train of war, we must make sure that the foundations of our republic are set on a rock that it may stand against the flood.

The peace and security of the world of the future will be in the safekeeping of the generation now in our schools. These boys and girls must "weave up the raveled sleeve" of civilization. Their hands must minister to the wounds of the nations. Their minds must meet and solve the difficult and crucial problems that will be their inheritance. Their hearts must be so imbued with the horrors of war and with the poverty and anguish that inevitably follow in its wake that they in their time will enter upon it only as a last resort in national self-defense or in support of some great principle of humanity.

Never has there been a more urgent need for high-minded, great-hearted, splendidly trained, 100 per cent. American instructors to drive home the vital lessons that these times hold. Never has the future of the nation been so clearly committed into the hands of the teachers. And yet thousands of men and women of ability who would prefer to teach are reluctantly leaving their chosen calling, forced by the hard necessities of their very existence.

The teachers ask no largess at the hands of fortune. They enter their profession for service, not riches. But they invest years and money in preparation for their life-work, and the knowledge they gain is shared with others who themselves use it to their own profit. Teachers, then, by every right and in all justice expect a return that will permit them and their dependents to live decently and in comfort.

In every community reached by THE LITERARY DIGEST there are readers of foresight, of vision, broad-minded men and thoughtful women who will see—nay, perhaps have long since seen—the critical and compelling importance of this problem. We are directing this appeal to them. We urge them to compare the salaries of their teachers with the wages of those who are doing work of equal value. There will be a challenge in the facts that will stir the community to action.

Let each community invest in schools so that it may thereby invest in a trained manhood and womanhood that can play their part in the great period of rebuilding and reconstruction that lies before us. Let each community set for its goal, as far as is practicable, a minimum wage of at least \$1,000 a year for the teachers of America. This would cost the nation perhaps as much as we spent so gloriously in but one week of the Great War.

We are not pleading merely for the welfare of some single profession; we are not pleading for a special class; we are pleading for America: for her larger, her brighter, her richer future, for the fulfilment of her glorious promise. We are pleading for a coming race of men and women who shall be qualified to make complete the work of our forefathers who founded this nation and dedicated it to liberty, and who will bring to full fruition the new victories that we have won in freedom's cause. We are pleading for a wider teaching of the principles, the purposes, and the ideals of this nation that all men shall know her meaning and shall have equal access to her opportunities;

*that the light of Americanism will so shine that it  
will flood every home, every heart, in our great land*

'Tis a  
Mark of  
Distinction to  
Be a Reader of  
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# The Literary Digest

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